

MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS RECRUITMENT INFORMATION
For American Red Cross Disaster Relief Operations
Hurricane Irene 8/28/2011

What is the Red Cross doing and what do they need?

The Red Cross has been providing shelter, feeding, health and mental health support to hundreds of thousands of people throughout the northeast. They will likely need more DMH workers and are reaching out to national professional mental health association partners to help recruit licensed or certified DMH-eligible volunteers.*

Be prepared for a waiting period before Red Cross training is available and before you can provide DMH support in your local community.

To become a Red Cross Disaster Mental Health volunteer:

- Enter your zip code under “Find your local Red Cross” at www.redcross.org to find the chapter closest to you.
- Register as a volunteer with the chapter.
 - Fill out a health status record
 - Complete a background check
 - Take Foundations of Disaster Mental Health training and Disaster Services: An Overview
- While you are waiting, any help you can provide to your local community and Red Cross chapter will be of great help. (In special circumstances, you may be notified of alternative training arrangements).

How can I help outside my local community?

- Give your local Red Cross chapter your dates of availability
- If assigned, make arrangements to be away from home for at least 10 days.
- Be prepared for the possibility that out-of-state deployment opportunities will not be available at the time you approach your local chapter
- ***Be prepared for there to be a waiting period before Red Cross training is available and before you can deploy out of state.***

How can a mental health professional help locally?

- Work with your local chapter to provide support to disaster survivors in your community
- Prepare Red Cross disaster relief workers for out-of-state assignments, support their families while they're gone and provide post-deployment support to workers returning from national assignments.
- Conduct media interviews on behalf of the chapter to discuss the common reactions individuals experience in the aftermath of disaster.
- Assist with other chapter support duties such as answering phones, preparing meals, filing, etc. While not typically considered traditional mental health services, helping out with these activities can help preserve the mental health of other Red Cross workers and staff.

What is different about volunteering with the Red Cross?

- **Be patient and flexible.** Situations in disaster change rapidly and needs are fluid. You may be asked to work at one site providing one type of service and then be switched to another site within a short period of time.
- **Our co-workers are also our clients.** 90% of Red Cross staff are volunteers just like you. They need your support.

- **You won't have an office.** Most mental health work done in disaster is done in non-traditional settings, like shelters and service centers. You may be providing support as you're going for a walk or sitting under a tree.
- **Provide non-traditional mental health services.**
 - Psychological first aid, triage, assessment and basic support
 - Early intervention is primarily focused on assisting disaster survivors and response workers in meeting their most basic needs.
 - Help people feel safe and secure
 - Obtaining food and water
 - Address physical health needs (e.g., first aid, medications)
 - Connect to family, friends, and other social support networks.
 - Psychotherapy is not appropriate.
- **The work is very satisfying And very frustrating.** You're working with people who have immediate needs for emotional support, food, shelter and other basics. The most basic need is information, which often you don't have because the situation is constantly changing. We do the best we can with the limited resources we have.

Why does it take so long to get deployed? Why is there so much paperwork?

- Essential information and background checks are needed to ensure the safety and welfare of Red Cross clients, volunteers and partners. Preparing disaster relief workers to respond in the aftermath of disaster can be extremely challenging. Chapter staff are often overworked and are often volunteers.
- The Red Cross places high value in getting the right people, to the right place, doing the right thing, at the right time. Sometimes that means taking more time before deployment in order to save time moving people later.
- Local Red Cross chapters are managing large amounts of requests from the community and from prospective volunteers.

What if I'm already a trauma specialist – why do I need special training?

- The Red Cross has a specific role in disaster response which is different from the regular work of most mental health professionals. Training is needed to understand that role.
- In order to minimize frustration, you need to understand the disaster response system and organization of the Red Cross.
- Most trauma interventions are not appropriate in the early aftermath of disaster, but your specialized training can be helpful in identifying those who are at risk for longer-term complications.

*Who is eligible to volunteer with the Red Cross?

- Independently-licensed, master's level (or higher) mental health professionals (psychiatrists, psychologists, licensed clinical social workers, marriage family therapists, professional counselors)
- State-licensed or state-certified school counselors and school psychologists
- RNs with a certification for psychiatric and mental health nursing to include RN-BC, PMHNP-BC or PMHCNS-BC.
- Must be licensed in the state in which you live